

## The Benefits of Exercise

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Suppose there was a pill with no harmful side-effects that would tone up your heart, circulation and lungs, help you lose weight, strengthen your bones, improve your balance and mood, reduce stress, sharpen your mental faculties and help you sleep better – would you take it? The answer would be a resounding “Yes!” Well, regular exercise does all of the above at every age. In addition, stronger muscles, flexibility and better balance make falls and injury less likely.

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### Q . Am I too old to exercise?

A . You are never too old to exercise. Exercise adds life to your years! It will not only keep you in shape, but you will feel better and enjoy life more. As well as the many benefits mentioned above, by keeping you fit, exercise will help you stay more independent.

### Q . What kind of exercise is best?

A . The best kind of exercise is the kind you enjoy and will do every day. Variety is not only the spice of life, but of exercise as well. Go for a nature hike, swim, golf, play tennis, lift weights, use exercise machines, walk – outside with your dog or inside a mall with your friends, ride a bicycle (good for your balance as well as your muscles), practice dance, yoga or tai chi just to name a few – the choice is yours. Exercising with friends can make it social and even more fun.

### Q . How often do I need to exercise and for how long?

A . Some exercise every day should be your goal. Since all exercise adds up, you can even do a few smaller workouts instead of one big one. For example, ten minutes in the morning, at lunchtime and in the evening still give you 30 minutes of exercise, even though divided up.

One suggestion is to walk 10,000 steps each day. If you find this hard to do, start off with as much exercise as you can, then add on a few more steps or a few more minutes every few days until you reach your goal. You should try some exercise that gets your heart pumping at least once a day, but this doesn't have to be overly vigorous activity. Try walking a little faster than usual or taking the stairs instead of the elevator.

**Q . I have tried to exercise before, but always got bored. How can I avoid this?**

**A .** Have a goal. Perhaps a vacation to look forward to - regular exercise can give you the stamina and mental calm to really enjoy your time away.

Find something you enjoy. Try dancing, swimming, or cycling. Having a variety of exercise options helps prevent boredom.

Try to meet with friends. Make your daily exercise a social and fun event. Make new friends, cheer each other on, and you will leave the session feeling good physically and mentally.

When you find you have more energy and are sleeping better, you'll want to continue.

**Q . Is housework and gardening considered exercise?**

**A .** Yes, it is gentle exercise but still counts. Moving around, digging, stretching and bending, reaching up to dust in high places all give a small but significant benefit, and it all adds up.

**Q . I am in a wheel chair. How can I exercise?**

**A .** "Exercise is for every body!" This is the slogan of the National Center on Physical Activity and Disability, and they have many good exercises and suggestions for fitness for people in wheelchairs (see below). Going through a variety of exercises daily confers the benefits described above, and there are books, articles, videos, and DVDs available to help.

**Q . I have arthritis in my joints and it hurts to exercise. What can I do?**

**A .** Swimming or water aerobics in a heated pool are good ways to start exercising if you have arthritis. As your muscles get stronger, you might even find your joint pains easing because strong muscles protect joints. If you have severe pain in your joints, or they are hot to touch, red or swollen, check with your health care provider before starting any exercise program.

**Q . I am taking several medicines. Is it all right for me to exercise?**

**A .** Ask your health care provider this question before starting an exercise program, especially if you are taking any kind of heart or blood pressure medicine.

\* Remember: If you experience shortness of breath, dizziness, cold or clammy skin, nausea, or chest pains while exercising, stop exercising immediately and contact your health care provider.



**Q . It is too hot/cold outside to exercise, how can I do it?**

**A .** One idea is mall walking, which has become popular in many places. Groups of seniors meet at regular intervals, mall walk, then have a coffee or soft drink together afterwards. Some lasting friendships have come out of this.

Most YMCAs have exercise programs and well-equipped exercise rooms. Many have special classes and rates for seniors, and they are air-conditioned/heated.

Many senior centers also have exercise programs for seniors, and the exercise plus meeting and talking with others can lift the spirits. There also are many videotapes and audiotapes that direct exercise routines that can be used in your own home.

**Q . My neighborhood is dangerous to go out walking alone – what can I do?**

**A .** Mall walk, go to the YMCA or a senior center. If transportation is an issue, see if you can link up with others in a similar situation. Some seniors get together and arrange for a taxicab or van to pick them up two or more days a week, drop them off, then return them home after the outing. If several people share the cost, it can be modest. You can also ask your local Area Agency on Aging and the nearest Senior Center if there is any free or low cost transportation available in your area.

**Q . Where can I get more information about exercise and its benefits?**

- **American Physical Therapy Association – Exercise Advice for Seniors:**  
<http://www.apta.org/Consumer/ptfordailyliving/youngat>
- **Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs)** are ready to help.  
These agencies offer programs for all older adults, from the frail older person who can remain at home if they receive the right services, to those who are healthy and can benefit from the activities and socialization provided by community-based programs such as senior centers. They are listed in local telephone books.
- **Eldercare Locator – 1-800-677-1116**  
The Eldercare Locator assists older people and their families to find community services for seniors anywhere in the country. Administered by the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging in cooperation with the National Association of State Units on Aging, the Eldercare Locator connects callers to the best state and community sources of information and assistance to address the issues, needs, or concerns of older persons and their caregivers. Eldercare Locator Information Specialists take calls Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. All calls are confidential. Recorded voice messaging is available 24 hours a day. **Eldercare Locator on the Web - [www.eldercare.gov](http://www.eldercare.gov)**
- **National Center on Physical Activity and Disability**  
Website: <http://www.ncpad.org>  
Email: [ncpad@uic.edu](mailto:ncpad@uic.edu)  
Phone: 800-900-8086 (voice and TTY)  
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